Chapter 6

Are We All Creoles? ‘Sable-Saffron’
Venus, Rachel Christie and Aesthetic Creolization

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Introduction

In ‘We are Creoles’, Édouard Glissant (1989) asserts that the world is permanently changing and creolizing itself. Édouard Glissant sees creolization as a contact of cultures that does not produce a simple métissage. Rather, creolization is a poetics of relation, which, as an ongoing process, is impossible to stop, has no morality, eludes capture and produces unexpected results (Perina, 2009). However, Glissantian creolization overlooks aesthetic creolization in terms of the racialized cultural politics of beauty. Developing a discussion based on aesthetic creolization will be the focus here to enable an assessment of whether or not England has gone beyond simple métissage and is being creolized at the level of such cultural politics.

The crowning of twenty-year-old black ‘mixed race’ Rachel Christie on July 20, 2009 as ‘Miss England’ brought home to the metropole the peculiar racialized cultural politics of beauty instantiated in Caribbean Creole societies during slavery and colonialism. What could Glissant’s ‘we are Creole’ mean in aesthetic terms? Did Rachel Christie as Miss England signal a nation that was Creole, that is, one that went beyond métissage to proclaim itself as ‘post-race’? Or were we seeing a creolization where a racialized poetics of relation enables the continuation of white racial
hegemony through the beauty pageant as a micro-strategy of aesthetic domination? These questions necessitate that we read ‘race’ as a technology which fixes the body as Other back into Glissantian creolization from the vantage point of Charles Mills’s (1997) *Racial Contract*.

Whilst drawing on Glissant’s insights, what will be argued from the vantage point enabled by Mills is that there is a racialized aesthetic poetics of relation in England. This ensures that only that black beauty which is recognized by the nation, that is a ‘mixed race’ one, can be validated. However, it is a validation with provisos which seeks to affirm the nation as creolizing in its present and possible futures. This affirmation aims to take the nation beyond ‘race mixing’, beyond *métissage*, as here we see a previously racially Othered and troubling body representing the very nation from which it has long been held apart. However, using the ideas of condensation and recycling (Ford, 2010), Christie’s body is revealed to be encoded as black through genealogy as well as ‘Venus’ through discourses on hypersexualization, animality and the black woman’s body as spectacle. Within the Miss England beauty pageant her body is codified through an aesthetic poetics of relation where her negation as ‘the English Rose’ maintains white aesthetic, cultural, social, political and moral hegemony as in colonial times. Let us now turn to look at the aesthetic poetics of relation forged during slavery and colonialism in the Black Atlantic diaspora in which *métissage* marked societies and bodies.

**An aesthetic poetics of relation and creolization**

Glissant (September 21, 1928–February 3, 2011) was an iconic figure in theorizing Antillean creolization and in developing an alternative system of thought from the continental. He coined this ‘the archipelic’ as he developed his approach to identity-as-relation and rhizomic identity (Murdoch, 2013). His work before *Discours Antillais* focused on Martinique and its social, political and cultural problems. *Discours Antillais* (1981) fleshed out concepts like creolization and *antillanité* and after this he developed his idea of *Tout-monde*, which demonstrated his vision of awareness of the postcolonial world in a phenomenological sense (Murdoch, 2013). Glissant (1989) claims that the world is in a permanent state of flux as it changes and creolizes itself (Perina, 2009). He views creolization as a contact of cultures which does much more than produce a simple *métissage*. Creolization is a poetics of relation which writes identity out of a historically, socially and culturally grounded Antillean experience – *antillanité*.

As an ongoing process creolization occurs through relation as ‘it inscribes a non-hierarchical principle of unity, a relation of equality with and respect for the other as different from oneself […] and a natural openness to other cultures’ (Murdoch, 2013, 875). Glissant locates the Caribbean archipelago as a zone of diversity which separates it from continental thought based on the
One of universalism. Further, as a process which produces something new no matter how fleetingly established, creolization seeks not to be universalized as essentialisms so often are but solely ‘brings into Relation’ hitherto disparate constituencies (Glissant, 1997, 90). Relation as a new dimension which allows subjects to be in several locations at once, both rooted and open, produces new identities through errantry which is a psychic mode of affirming identities, as opposed to exile, which has the potential to erode one’s identity (20). Here errantry includes the collective and the individual in knowing that ‘the Other is within us and affects how we evolve as well as the bulk of our conceptions and the development of our sensibility’ (27). It is this impossible simultaneity of the same/Other in identifications that we see in creolization’s poetics of relation. The Other, so much a part of our identifications, is multiple and takes us beyond indentifications that seek to show the origins, the ‘roots’, the two that make the one, as is the case in métissage. Instead, creolization moves us to ‘a new and original dimension allowing each person to be there and elsewhere’ (34). In other words, Glissant’s creolization enables us to identify and disidentify with the Other in order to emerge as Others of ourselves. We, therefore, leave behind ‘philosophies of the One in the West’ and enter into repetition ‘an acknowledged form of consciousness both here and elsewhere. Relentlessly resuming something you have already said’ (46). Creolization does not entail loss of identity, or renouncing of the self, but a distancing from fixity.

If we go back to Glissant’s creolization as a contact of cultures that goes beyond métissage and its distancing from fixity, we could say that in such a world beauty would be multiple and not based on politically, socially or culturally constructed ideal types. Sadly, we do not occupy such a world as we can see in the norms that deny beauty’s social construction, its racialization and the existence of a white beauty hegemony which defies democratization. Such beauty denials enable us to see that the body is the object of power/knowledge (Foucault, 1995). Beauty discourses are regimes of truth socially constructed through meditations on the body which have occupied European thought for centuries and ensure that at any particular time only some beauty will be given recognition.

The racialization of beauty, one could claim, reached its zenith with African enslavement in the Americas and the Caribbean. One of the technologies essential for its institutionalization was the construction of the beautiful/ugly binary and its correlations with inferiority of mind or character (Nuttall, 2006). Therefore, within the Black Atlantic diaspora’s racialized aesthetic hegemony beauty has been constructed since colonialism, slavery and empire as an attribute that pertains to some bodies rather than others (Figueiredo, 2003; Nuttall, 2006; Tate, 2009; Pinho, 2010). The white body is beauty while all other beauties have been disavowed and placed as ugly. Beauty is racialized, political and profoundly ideological as has been recognized by numerous black anti-racist and black feminist writings.
Are We All Creoles?

(Weekes, 1997; Banks, 2000; Rooks, 2000; Taylor, 2000; Hill Collins, 2004; Cooper, 2004; Hobson, 2005; Hunter, 2005; Craig, 2006; Tate, 2007; 2009).

Such work reminds us that history still haunts the present even if we see ourselves engaged in Stuart Hall’s (1996) resignification of blackness through recognizing and deconstructing artefacts from past ideologies of racism in contemporary times. Two artefacts which are still read on the bodies of black women are ugliness and hypersexuality. This can be seen, for example, in the construction of the ‘Sable Venus’ and its ‘mixed-race’ counterpart the ‘Saffron Venus’ in the Caribbean which enabled the normalization of ‘the English Rose’ as its aesthetic relational binary.

In Western art, Venus has been most frequently represented by white females as in Boticelli’s Venus, read as an ideal of beauty (Nelson, 2010). Therefore, to attach the words ‘Hottentot’, ‘black’, ‘sable’ or ‘saffron’ as prefixes to ‘Venus’ is an ironic gesture which substitutes a grotesque, racially Othered body for the expected white female body (Nelson, 2010). ‘Venus’ is not a positive appellation but places ‘sex worker’ onto black women’s bodies and engages ‘white moral, sexual and racial superiority’ (Yancy, 2008, 95).

The fragility, whiteness and asexual feminine beauty of the English Rose were discursively constructed through its binary, the Sable-Saffron Venus, during slavery and colonialism in the English-speaking Caribbean.

The Voyage of the Sable Venus from Angola to the West Indies by Thomas Stothard is the best-known pro-slavery image focused on the Caribbean. The Sable Venus’s toned muscles marked her as a laborer, her collar made her a slave, while her nakedness illustrated her availability for sex. Further, as ‘sable’, she was animalized. This racial Othering was typical of white discourses on African women whose bodies were consumed in sex, domestic, care and field work on Caribbean plantations. Her eighteenth-century representation in the poem The Sable Venus: An Ode, by Isaac Teale (1765), on which the painting and its engraving by William Grainger is based (Smith McCrea, 2002), articulates the common sense at the time of black women as willing and submissive sexual partners, as well as erasing the brutal fact

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1 O Sable Queen! Thy mild Domain
   I seek and court thy gentle reign
   So soothing, soft and sweet.
   Where meeting love, sincere delight
   Fond pleasures, ready joys invite,
   And unbrought raptures meet.

   Do thou in gentle Phibia smile,
   In artful Benneba beguile,
   In wanton Mimba pout
   In sprightly Cuba’s eyes look gay
   Or grave in sober Quasheba
   I still find thee out[.]
of slavery and the horrors of the slave trade in the Caribbean itself (Bush, 1990; Mohammed, 2000). The Ode ends with all of Jamaica, including ‘the people of quality’, from Port Royal, Spanish Town and Kingston, coming to greet the Sable Venus on her arrival in the island and the poet declaring his utter devotion to her whether she appears as ‘gentle Phibia’, ‘artful Benneba’, ‘wanton Mimba’, ‘sprightly Cuba’ or ‘sober Quasheba’. The people of quality in Jamaica would, of course, have been slave owners whose first sight of her would have been on the slave blocks as she was put up for sale.

Though an English-Jamaican creation, the Ode was widely circulated and no doubt had an impact on eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century pro-slavery mindsets. The Sable Venus was also imprinted on the bodies of black ‘mixed race’ women, so-called ‘saffron’ by Bryan Edwards.2 The Saffron Venus is visible in paintings of the era such as the pro-slavery painter Agostino Brunias’s (1728–96) work *West India Washer Women* (c.1773–75) (Figure 1).

Saffron Venus is naked to the waist as are the Sable Venuses who surround her, wears the head-wrap of a slave and reveals muscular arms and legs, rounded stomach and pert breasts to her audience. She stands above the other women with whom she does not engage, which gives the impression that her lighter skin color and white father place her above them. Again, muscle shows that she is a slave, while nakedness locates her in the space of savagery rather than that of refined nude irrespective of her being ‘mixed race’. ‘The nude’ and ‘the naked’ have often been applied to the female body in Western art with the former being associated with ‘the beautiful’ through the heterosexual male gaze (Nelson, 2010). ‘The naked’, though, is aligned with hypersexuality, immorality and the pornographic, as it highlights the process of undressing and the social and biological body (Nelson, 2010). What we see in both the Sable and Saffron Venuses is lack of contrived womanly innocence or nature as a veil, which mark nudes like Botticelli’s Venus as artistic, non-pornographic and thus not a moral threat to the white body politic. There was no moral threat felt by the depiction of naked black women’s bodies as they merely occupied their natural space of hypersexual, enslaved, masculinized labor that could be used and discarded at will.

As black and naked, the Saffron Venus is visible to the voyeur’s eye as a ‘mixed-race’ woman whose very embodiment speaks of the hypersexuality

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2 Bryan Edwards (1793, 26) states: ‘I shall therefore conclude the present chapter by presenting to my readers, a performance of a deceased friend, in which the character of the sable and saffron beauties of the West Indies, and the folly of their paramours, are portrayed with the delicacy and dexterity of wit, and the fancy and elegance of genuine poetry’, before then reproducing in full Teale’s ‘The Sable Venus: An Ode’, written in Jamaica in 1765, in which Teale, his teacher, names him as being the audience for the poem. The poem can therefore be seen to be about colonial racial hygiene, as it was about the folly of miscegenation.
of her mother, the sexual entrapment of her father and her own ‘hot constitution’ (Mohammed, 2000) because of her ‘black blood’. These paintings and others like them as artefacts of colonial visual culture were sites where ‘raced’ identities were constructed. They assembled what the English Rose was not by reinforcing the privilege of the white colonial female body as worthy of being covered and protected. Nakedness represented female sexuality as primitive and pathological – thus, the naked/nude binary took part in creating the English Rose/Sable-Saffron Venus divide which was

Figure 1 Agostino Brunias (1728–96), West India Washer Women, c.1773–75
Courtesy of the Institute of Jamaica, The National Collection of Jamaica
Figure 2 Rachel Christie, Miss England 2009
Courtesy of photoshot.com
linked to relations of domination in the colonies and the metropole. This was the case even when the white female body was liminal and nearer to the primitiveness of the black body in the perceived threat it posed to colonial white male identity (Gilman, 1985).

The two paintings *The Sable Venus* and the *West India Washer Women* construct the white woman’s identity in her absence due to the racialized corporeal schema which governs the artists’ representations of black women’s bodies. Even if we were to look at these paintings as early forms of ‘negrophilia’, described by Nelson (2010) as the social and cultural phenomenon of white fear/desire for the black body, we could not see them as positive or affirmative. In depicting primitivity, hypersexuality, sexual availability and enslavement, these paintings (re)produced blackness as infrahuman and located the white female body as beautiful, civilized, even if not rational and intelligent because that was the preserve of white men.

The construction of the Sable Venus and her ‘mixed-race’ counterpart the Saffron Venus in the Caribbean in opposition to the English Rose already places beauty as racialized and incapable of being judged without the intervention of racialized ideology. Even Immanuel Kant’s (1914, 88) reflections on beauty as a judgement of taste in the *Critique of Judgement* show that taste is itself racialized, as are judgements of beauty and perfection because beauty norms are ‘racially’ differentiated.

In England today, where we have aspirations of racial equality institutionalized in law and bureaucracy overlaying the reality of racial inequality, it can only be expected that white aesthetic domination will remain. This means that those individuals who possess characteristics that are seen as white will be considered beautiful. However, the Black Atlantic diaspora has shown that there will always be creolized discourses and practices on beauty which contest the white hegemonic ideal as has been the case in, for example, Rastafarianism (Barrett, 1977), Afro-Brazilian aesthetics (Pinho, 2006; 2010; Nuttall, 2006; Caldwell, 2007), Black Power (Banks, 2000; Craig, 2006) and Jamaican modern blackness (Mohammed, 2000; Tate, 2009). However, within the Black Atlantic, the prevalent fallacies that beauty is white and that all black women want to be white still persist. These fallacies resist aesthetic creolization through keeping white aesthetic domination in place. However, does a black Miss England (Figure 2) mean we are all creoles now?

**Does a black Miss England mean we are all creoles?**

There have been black beauty pageants in England for at least half a century. They and the Caribbean Carnival were started by Marxist, anti-racist, anticolonialist activist Claudia Jones in the face of struggle against detractors who felt that carnivals and beauty contests were trivial because of the larger issues of rights (Davies, 2008). However, 'Jones clearly felt that Caribbean traditions had much to offer the world in terms of creating a culture of
human happiness over the ignorance and pain of racism, and indeed that it was a people's culture that provided them with the basis for freedom' (Davies, 2008, 174). Beauty pageants, therefore, are not apolitical spaces, as Claudia Jones knew. Instead, they are political building blocks for the nation as they illustrate how it imagines itself and wants to be seen on the world stage. Choosing the ‘face of the nation’ continues to be deeply political whether we are in the Caribbean or England, as through the prism of aesthetics it points to the continuation of class, ‘race’ and ethnic hegemonies or their dismantling.

What has been argued above is that there is an aesthetic poetics of relation in the Black Atlantic in which the Sable-Saffron Venus/English Rose binary and its accompanying ideology of white beauty–morality and black ugliness–depravity continue to resist Glissantian creolization and to frame quotidian interactions. This binary still frames who can occupy the space of Miss England, which body will be validated, given admission to the community of the nation as its representative, as its ‘face’. In order to excavate Rachel Christie’s *Daily Mail* interview for this binary, I will use Kianga K. Ford’s (2010) idea of ‘condensation’ and ‘recycling’. Condensation derives from Sigmund Freud’s discussion of dreamwork in which the impermissible can come into representation by disguising the significance of its representable elements so that the objectionable racist contents remain obscure and its manifestation is made more or less benign. Thus, condensation allows racist ideas or thoughts to continue to exist in a less obviously offensive form (Ford, 2010). Recycling in daily practice does not produce exactly the same object though it may be constituted by the same material and may renew the effectiveness of existing racial texts (Ford, 2010).

Both condensation and recycling enable us to note that Antonio Gramsci’s cultural hegemony is at play in an aesthetic poetics of relation as opposed to the oppression of naked domination. This could indeed account for Rachel Christie’s choice as Miss England 2009 because hegemony itself is unstable. However, although Gramsci’s hegemony is unstable, the aesthetic poetics of relation in the Black Atlantic is marked by ‘race’ domination and a white-raced consensus has been built around the impossibility of black beauty which is difficult to subvert in states which operate within and through the Racial Contract. The excavation of the interview will show that Christie’s impact on the English national affective terrain was not one of ‘negrophilia’ but ‘negrophobia’ based on anti-black stereotypes. These stereotypes illustrate that the English nation is not creolized in Glissant’s terms, as it is not beyond métissage because its cultural, political, institutional and psychic space is occupied by the epistemology of ignorance gleaned from colonialism.

We can see this if we turn to the *Daily Mail* interview on July 25, 2009 by Francis Hardy, ‘I won Miss England to prove that being black is NEVER an excuse for failure says Linford Christie’s niece’. Hardy (2009) orients us as readers to a deciphering of Christie as Miss England which
shows her lack of fit as the English Rose, the face of the nation, because of class, ‘race’ and hypersexuality. The interview constructs her genealogy as black Jamaican as Linford Christie’s niece and this sets up the impossibility of her Englishness. Linford Christie OBE is still the only British man to have won gold in four major athletics championships: the Olympics, the Commonwealth Games, the World Championships and the European Championships. He has recently been in the public eye as the ‘spokes-body’ for Kleenex Pockets, an ultra-thin pack of tissues designed to fit into men’s trouser pockets. The campaign tagline, ‘I’ve got a tiny packet’, is written across Christie’s trademark impressively muscled upper body. ‘Tiny packet’ makes us remember that Linford is known for his ‘lunchbox’ from his heyday as a sprinter because of the bulge apparent in his lycra shorts. His lunchbox and now his tiny packet allude to the diminishing of black men to just their genitals instituted during colonialism and slavery. Linking Linford and Rachel as kin starts a chain of racialized associations in which hypersexuality and the body as spectacle become the focus.

Though still linked to the United Kingdom through her white mother and place of birth, her genealogy is also constructed as a subaltern one because of class, drugs, jail time and Irish Catholic descent. She is the daughter of a white Irish Catholic mother and a working-class black Jamaican-descent father who served time in jail because of drugs, and later died in a street drugs fight. Her parents’ status meant that she lived a life of poverty on a London ‘sink’ council estate. Her black ‘mixed-race’ background continues to be presented as a source of dysfunction and family trouble, which is a familiar trope born from the United Kingdom’s informal anti-miscegenation regime (Christian, 2008). Another part of her story is a familiar trope for explaining black underachievement. Her lack of academic ability made her turn to her athletic capabilities, eventually becoming a fitness instructor and Olympic hopeful. Again, the national narrative is that of the only possibility of black success lying within sport – as for her uncle Linford Christie – or, because she is a woman, modelling. Further, her body is placed in the masculinized black woman’s space of ‘the body as machine’ in the focus on her athletic abilities, her kinship with Linford Christie and the comparison to another black athlete, Dame Kelly Holmes. We are also oriented to her body as spectacle in the focus on her height, her turn to modelling and the article’s comparison of her with Naomi Campbell. It is this latter comparison alongside the stress on her as black which reveals the turn to the Venus trope even though the word is never mentioned.

Naomi Campbell has long been the Black Venus for Dolce & Gabbana, and, for example, she was featured in their 2011 Animalier eyewear campaign. The animal print swimsuit and glasses remind us that Naomi was called ‘Black Panther’ in her supermodel heyday. Naomi also has another place in the English imagination, as seen in the Cadbury Dairy Milk Bliss advertisement, in 2011, which saw the chocolate bar surrounded by diamonds and the words ‘Move over Naomi, there’s a new diva in town. I am the world’s
most pampered bar, now in three new flavours’. After much public outrage, and the model’s threat to sue Cadbury, the advertisement was removed. The company apologized after initially saying that it was just a tongue-in-cheek play on her reputation for tantrums; the Advertising Standards Authority threw out complaints that the advertisement was racist. Comparing Rachel to Naomi is not a compliment but rather another reminder of her blackness, Otherness and her body’s location as spectacle.

On the surface, however, we could say that the article attempts to construct a ‘post-race’ perspective on black experience, as we can see in its headline and in the extracts of the interview with Rachel Christie chosen for inclusion. In insisting that ‘race’ should not be an excuse for failure, while acknowledging the continuation of institutional racism in sport and society more generally, her words could be read as showing that she has lost some sense of the impact of white power. This is so as she relates success to ‘post-race’ ideas of the necessity for hard work but also to a middle-class habitus based on consumption and comportment:

You hear black kids say: ‘I can’t do anything with my life. I live in a ghetto’. I say: ‘Well, get off your backside and get out of it. Stop making your ethnicity an excuse’. I want to show them you can do anything you want, whatever your colour. I don’t like hearing: ‘I can’t do this or that because I’m black’. They should stop behaving in a way that stereotypes them. If you come across as smart, if you dress nicely and speak well, it shouldn’t make a difference if you are black or white. Maybe some people have experienced racial discrimination. Not me.

This ‘not me’, ‘maybe some people have experienced [it]’ denial of racism, the focus on the Protestant ethic and insistence on the existence of a meritocracy, places Christie within the ‘post-race’ English mindset and, as such, ideologically, she can represent the nation as Miss England. However, ‘race’ still halts her progress to the location of the English Rose as she recognizes when she asserts habitus as being more significant than ‘race’ – ‘it shouldn’t make a difference if you are black or white’. The ‘shouldn’t’ rather than ‘wouldn’t’ signifies that she knows that ‘race’ affects one’s life chances. ‘Shouldn’t’ locates her within a ‘third-space’ errantry as she speaks back to the English nation using its sentiments of twenty-first-century assimilative tolerance which nonetheless assert the impossibility of ‘race’ equality. In Glissant’s terms, she is saying that as a nation we have not yet moved beyond métissage to creolization. Further, she places her entry to and winning of the Miss England pageant as being political in that she wanted to show black youngsters what was possible. Thus, she outlines her own particular group of interest as the black English and thus achieves what Hall (1996, 27) calls a ‘re-epidermalization, an auto-graphy’ of herself as black on her own terms.

Her auto-graphy as black English creates a disturbance in the national skin as her body does not have the mimetic quality of going towards
whiteness, even as Miss England, because she is ‘mixed race’. The continuing significance of the one-drop rule or hypodescent (Zack, 1993; Ifekwunigwe, 1999) stops this possibility of extension. This very impossibility enables a reading of her black ‘mixed-race’ body as displacing the eye of surveillance through Bhabha’s (1994) mimicry. That is, her body disrupts the state narrative of tolerance and national ‘post-race’ pretensions because as black it produces the necessity for narratives of origin and essential difference. These narratives keep embodied memories and epistemologies of ‘race’ power in play as an integral aspect of identifications that arise in the rupture produced by her body. As such, her body refuses whiteness and insists on different categories of recognition as English. However, this refusal is returned to us as a casting out of the body of the nation, as abjection, through the careful construction of her lineage as black in the article.

If we think about her as an inheritor of slavery’s Sable-Saffron Venus positioning in the twenty-first century, she has already been placed as the binary of white beauty and femininity. We can see this subaltern sexualized location in the descriptions of her that the interviewer uses and in the question of virginity that she was asked. For example, we are told that her ‘voice is soft and low but her resolve is steely’. At the same time as she is feminized through her voice she is masculinized because of her resolve. We are also told that she used to be a tomboy and reminded throughout of her athletic ability. The interviewer’s question of whether or not she lost her virginity to her ex-boyfriend was not answered but seems peculiarly out of place. This is especially so as Christie presents herself as someone who aims for respectable married status, as should any English Rose. Indeed, one can only assume that the specter of the Sable-Saffron Venus and its impossibility of English Rose status underlie such a question. Christie’s refusal to answer shows her critique of the hypersexualized space of the Venus as an affective body in a nation in which ‘race’ stubbornly refuses to go beyond métissage, to be creolized. The continuation into the twenty-first century United Kingdom of Sable-Saffron Venus points to the necessity to think through the cultural politics of beauty within the Racial Contract as this impacts on the possibility of aesthetic creolization.

**Aesthetics, the Racial Contract and the poetics of relation**

Both globally and within particular nations, then, white people, Europeans and their descendants, continue to benefit from the Racial Contract, which creates a world in their cultural image, political states differentially favouring their interests, an economy structured around the racial exploitation of others, and a moral psychology (not just in whites sometimes in nonwhites also) skewed consciously and unconsciously toward privileging them, taking the status quo of differential racial
entitlement as normatively legitimate, and not to be investigated further. (Mills, 1997, 40)

The Racial Contract produces an epistemology of ignorance in which ‘white is right’ and equates with dominance so that thoughts on beauty and its representations are already skewed towards whiteness. The denial that beauty is racialized means that beauty is de-politicized unless we subscribe to black anti-racist aesthetics (Taylor, 2000; Hobson, 2005; Hunter, 2005; Tate, 2009). If we look solely at skin we see how problematic such an assumption of de-politicization is, as our skin is a key interface between the self and the Other, between the psychic, biological, political and social (Tate, 2009). Didier Anzieu (1990, 63) uses Freud’s insight on the ego as having a bodily nature to coin the term ‘the skin ego’ as ‘the ego is the projection in the psyche of the surface of the body, namely the skin’. For Anzieu, the skin ego encompasses the skin’s impact on the mind and as a surface on which signs are written, speaks of the impact of culture on the psyche (Tate, 2009). If the Racial Contract already designates that ‘white is right’ then black women are placed within an aesthetic poetics of relation in the Black Atlantic where they continue to risk being exiled from themselves, their skin ego, if they unquestioningly accept white beauty as the ideal. This psychic domination has been critiqued repeatedly by black anti-racist aesthetics (Taylor, 2000) and it is certainly not part of the creolization that Glissant envisaged.

This is so, as, for Glissant (1997), exile has the potential to erode one’s identity. We can see exile as a mechanism of power within the Racial Contract that encourages us, through its hegemonic beauty ideals, beauty practices and discourses on beauty, to reproduce its racial epidermal schema and to forget longstanding alter/native Black Atlantic beauty models such as those produced through Rastafarianism, Black Power, Afro-Brazilian aesthetics and Black ‘punnany power feminism’ (Sharpley Whiting, 2007; Lee, 2010). Glissant (1997, 20) opposes exile with ‘errantry’ as a psychic mode of affirming identities. Errantry is not apolitical but is a ‘will to identity’ as one is ‘no longer traveller, discoverer or conqueror’. As is the case for black anti-racist aesthetics, errantry would mean that in terms of beauty black women would develop alter/native beauty ideologies, practices and judgements of taste and beauty not based on a white standard but acknowledging that this, through relation with the Other, is one among many other beauties. In such an aesthetic poetics of relation, where beauty is democratized, errantry includes the collective and the individual in knowing that ‘the Other is within us and affects how we evolve as well as the bulk of our conceptions and the development of our sensibility’ (Glissant, 1997, 27). Thus, our ‘race’ sensibility in the Black Atlantic develops within Homi Bhabha’s (1990, 211) ‘third-space’ that is not an identity but rather about identification, ‘a process of identifying with and through another object, an object of otherness’. Within ‘third-space’ errantry, Black Atlantic discourses,
ideologies and practices of/on beauty speak back to the constructions of Sable-Saffron Venus as Other, thus, also enabling black beauties to emerge.

Admitting both the black and white Other into beauty identifications through critique acknowledges the black diasporic condition and takes us beyond a creolization that seeks to show the origins, the ‘roots’, the two that make the one, as in métissage, to ‘a new and original dimension allowing each person to be there and elsewhere’ (Glissant, 1997, 34). In other words, Glissant’s creolization enables us to identify and disidentify with the black/white Other in beauty terms. This process of identification/disidentification as a part of the aesthetic poetics of relation in the Black Atlantic also extends the ethical obligation to produce a limitless array of discourses on, and practices of, black beauty. ‘Third-space’ errantry is thus not rendered apolitical, but holds fast to the decolonial imperative of liberation from the Racial Contract and the racialized aesthetics of its epistemology of ignorance which keep white domination in place.

In the aesthetic poetics of relation enabled by third-space errantry in the Black Atlantic diaspora we are continually called on to inhabit ‘black’ anew in a present-future which is not ‘post-race’. Here black women leave the past of métissage and the Sable-Saffron Venus behind as a haunting memory of identification exile from themselves. They, therefore, leave behind ‘philosophies of the One in the West’ which locate beauty on white bodies. Such is the work of an aesthetic poetics of relation that does not seek assimilation or annihilation of the Other as during plantation slavery but rather acknowledges blackness as performative and permissive of a variety of cultural forms, practices, ideologies and bodies without forgetting the politics of domination within which it is formed. The Black Atlantic diaspora’s transnationalism has led to a universalization of black beauty ideologies, politics and practices that removes it from the realm of a creolization which solely ‘brings into Relation but not to universalize’ (Glissant, 1997, 90). Rather, we are now in a time of black beauty’s multiple identifications and practices which we can recognize from the Caribbean, Brazil and the USA to the United Kingdom.

Rachel Christie as Miss England ruptures the aesthetic politics of the Racial Contract and makes us wonder if we are now at a point in England in which black beauties are possible. The report of her triumph in the Gleaner newspaper in Jamaica was about a Jamaican heritage woman winning the Miss England contest. In the times of the legendary Jamaican poet, Dr the Honorable Louise Bennett Coverley (1919–2006), this would have been seen as emblematic of ‘colonisation in reverse’,3 where because of the impact of the

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3 Wat a joyful news Miss Mattie,
I feel like me heart gwine burs
Jamaica people colonizin
Englan in Reverse
migration, settlement and Englishness of the Jamaican heritage population, England has been creolized. Indeed, it could be taken as evidence for the assumption that it has been creolized to such an extent that black beauty has now become part of the norm. Further, black beauty could even be seen to have trumped the white ideal and black ‘mixed-race’ beauty could perhaps now be envisioned as one of the English beauty ideals especially if it exhibited straighter hair and lighter skin.

Beauty pageants have the function of choosing a beauty which stands in for the nation (Rowe, 2009). As such, there is a mimetic connection between whoever wears the Miss England crown and England’s social skin. In Christie’s case, if we think this mimetic creolization as a possibility then we exist within Glissant’s exile. Further, if we do not think through ‘third-space’ errantry with the materiality of the racialized body, then we subject ourselves to that epistemology of ignorance which refuses the continuing significance of white privilege. To be clear, the question we should ask here is, ‘if she was darker skinned, had locks and facial features which have been discursively constructed to appear more black, would she have become Miss England?’ If we answer honestly then we would have to say, ‘no’. She won because the ‘black mixed-race’ beauty stereotype from slavery and colonialism persists and in its persistence places other black beauties as ugly through its continuing valorization of those bodily characteristics considered as white.

She was Miss England 2009 even though she is not the stereotype of the English Rose and racial inequality persists in England, as we saw in the police shooting of Mark Duggan, which sparked the Tottenham uprisings in August 2011. We could see her crowning as a counter strategy of a state that is in conflict with itself because it has overlain the continuing Racial Contract with a bureaucracy of racial equality and a discourse of assimilative tolerance in an attempt to present itself as ‘post-race’. This could account for the paradox of Rachel Christie within the continuing aesthetics of white iconicity. However, to crown her as Miss England does not in fact disturb the status quo on this reading because of the beauty hegemony constructed since colonial times. Rather, her very body acts to highlight its lack of fit in a space that has always already been defined as that of the English Rose, as white.

[...] 
Dem a pour out a Jamaica
Everybody future plan
Is fe get a big-time job
An settle in de mother lan
[...]
Wat a devilment a Englan!
Dem face war an brave de worse,
But me wonderin how dem gwine stan
Colonizin in reverse
Black bodies have a disruptive impact at the level of the nation, whether it is as inner city ‘rioters’, muggers, single mothers or Miss England. As Miss England, Christie’s body was symbolically charged. It produced a new affective relational politics which challenged the nation to go beyond asserting English méttissage to embracing racial equality. Christie’s story, her body itself, stakes a claim in the national narrative, but it is a story of racism, sexism, poverty and achievement in spite of ‘race’ or, indeed, perhaps within the parameters produced by the Racial Contract’s possibility of ‘entry but only so far’. Her interviewer reflected white fear of her choice as Miss England. Paradoxically, though, he also showed white condescension, as in placing her in the position of non-academic, athletic, from a problem family, poor and hypersexual Sable-Saffron Venus, he ensured that the English Rose was kept firmly in place in readers’ minds as that which Rachel Christie was not and could not become.

**Conclusion – creolization and affective bodies**

Time has not meant the dissipation of the affective impact of such connections within the English national psyche as set into play by Rachel Christie. The English racial nomos (Gilroy, 2004) keeps in play multiple memories of and on the black woman’s body, its deviant sexuality and its location as spectacle. As black, Christie never displaced the English Rose but rather showed her lack of fit in a role which was always already designated as white. As a nation, England is not yet at the point of the emergence of a new aesthetic poetics of relation which enables beauty decolonization. However, if we look at this in terms of the rupture of white beauty’s hegemonic hold on the imagination, identifications, practices and ideologies of black beauty, we can say that within black communities that moment has long been upon us. It is the white imagination which has to be decolonized in terms of the aesthetics of the Racial Contract so that the status quo of white beauty as iconic can be delegitimized in order to produce an aesthetic creolization of England.

**Works Cited**


